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SUBJECT: RUSSIA FM CRITICIZES JAPAN'S ROLE IN G8 REGARDING
GEORGIA

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Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer. Reasons 1.4 (B) (D)

11. (C) Summary. Russian FM Lavrov leveled pointed criticisms and expressed displeasure with Tokyo's policies toward Russia during a November 4-5 visit to Japan. The Russian said Moscow sees little advancement in bilateral relations) a fact for which Tokyo is solely responsible, he charged. Lavrov also criticized Japan's statements on Russian actions in Georgia and shared strong dissatisfaction with Tokyo's chairmanship of the G8 process. On the Northern Territories, MOFA told us Lavrov contradicted the positive tone toward resolving the status of the disputed region set by President Medvedev during the July 2008 Lake Toya G8 Summit, and displayed a negative attitude about the advantages of entering into negotiations. Japanese government officials now wonder if the Russian FM meant to "sabotage" Medvedev's position. Lavrov also discussed the current global economic turmoil and North Korea. End Summary.

Pointed Displeasure

12. (C) On November 18, Russia Division Principal Deputy Director Kotaro Otsuki briefed Embassy Tokyo on the November 4-5 visit to Japan of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. During a brief stopover, Lavrov attended an event in Hakodate City, Hokkaido, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the founding of a former Russian Consulate. The FM also delivered a speech at an event hosted by the International Exchange of Friendship Council before holding a three-hour meeting with Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone. Their discussion focused on four major areas: 1) Northern Territories, 2) Georgia and the G8, 3) the current world-wide financial crises, and 4) North Korea.

13. (C) During the meeting, the Russian side leveled pointed

criticisms and expressed displeasure with several of Tokyo's policies. According to Otsuki, Lavrov said Moscow saw little advancement in bilateral cooperation between the two countries) a situation for which Tokyo was solely responsible, he charged. Otsuki contrasted the atmospherics of the just-completed ministerial with those of previous high-level discussions, which usually ended with diplomatic statements papering over unresolved differences. Otsuki noted Japanese officials conclude, as a result, that Russia is unhappy about Tokyo's response to Moscow's summer invasion of Georgia.

Northern Territories

14. (C) According to the official written statement on the visit on MOFA's official Web site, Lavrov offered support for remarks made by President Dmitry Medvedev on the margins of the July 2008 Lake Toya G8 Summit, in which the Russian President said Moscow wants to settle the Northern Territories (NT) issue and is determined to advance discussions. According to Otsuki, however, Lavrov surprised Japanese officials by contradicting the positive tone of Medvedev's message and appeared to be "negative toward the advantages of entering into negotiations." Nakasone pointed out that Lavrov's attitude appeared to be inconsistent with that of the Russian President, and expressed some "dissatisfaction" of his own with how Russian officials had been dealing with the NT issue. Lavrov countered that his views were the same as the President. Otsuki stated that the Japanese side found "Lavrov's statement unhelpful in terms of advancing the relationship." Japanese government officials are speculating whether the Russian FM had deliberately intended to "sabotage" Medvedev's position.

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Georgia

15. (C) Lavrov told Nakasone Moscow was "critical of Japan's evaluation and statements on Russian behavior" with regard to the invasion of Georgia, Otsuki reported. The Russian FM also "shared his strong dissatisfaction with the G8 process," while noting "Japan's chairmanship was not helpful in creating an atmosphere in which to develop the bilateral relationship." Lavrov presented a paper on the Georgian conflict containing three main points:

-- Russia had been forced to act to protect the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

-- Moscow will obey international law.

-- Russian officials hope to create a partnership with Japan in the international arena based on mutual understanding.

16. (C) Nakasone replied that "Russia's unilateral behavior with regard to Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not help efforts to increase international security," and that Russian behavior was not consistent with its responsibilities as a G8 member. Otsuki confided that Japanese officials were concerned about Moscow's attempt to link Tokyo's chairmanship of the G8 to the bilateral relationship. Otsuki said Japanese officials are puzzled over the inconsistency between Lavrov's critical approach during the visit and his stated desire to create an international partnership with Tokyo.

Global Financial Turmoil

17. (C) Lavrov offered a simple and clear message on the financial situation, Otsuki noted. Medvedev appears to be

interested in participating in the reform of the international financial system. The Russian FM presented a paper detailing Moscow's strong desire to participate in the reform and decision-making processes, with the goal, according to Lavrov, of producing a new financial system.

North Korea

18. (C) Lavrov noted that the North Korean Foreign Minister briefed Russian officials on the United States-DPRK nuclear verification deal during a visit to Moscow just prior to Lavrov's arrival in Tokyo. The Russian FM noted the DPRK view on the verification regime differed from that of the United States. Moscow believes the IAEA will play an important role in the verification mechanism. Lavrov expressed willingness to help Japan with the abduction issue. However, Russia would work through its own channels and is concerned the abduction issue might be an obstacle to advancing the Six-Party Talks process.

2008 Summit Meetings: Medvedev Maybe; Putin Probably Not

19. (C) Plans for a bilateral meeting on the margins of the November APEC meeting in Lima between Medvedev and PM Taro Aso are under coordination, Otsuki advised. He noted a possible visit to Tokyo by President Vladimir Putin, which both sides have been discussing since the July G-8 meeting, might be difficult to organize before the end of 2008. (Note: Japanese press reports on November 20 indicate Putin's visit has been put off until early 2009.)
SCHIEFFER